

DVI roles and responsibilities

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Senior identification manager

Disaster victim identification (DVI) managers and personnel should have completed the College of Policing approved DVI courses relevant to their role.

The senior identification manager (SIM) is a senior police investigator and leader responsible for managing all aspects of the identification process.

The [strategic commander](#) appoints the SIM where there are fatalities or there is an expectation of fatalities.

See [SIM Initial Actions](#).

Responsibilities

SIM responsibilities include:

- consulting with the senior investigating officer (SIO) and managing the disaster victim identification (DVI) process
- liaising with the coroner or procurator fiscal
- setting a casualty bureau (CB) strategy and appointing a trained and competent CB manager
- setting a communications strategy in consultation with the strategic commander, tactical commander and SIO
- setting [involvement gradings](#), including SIM questions
- setting a [missing persons](#) cancellation policy
- briefing and debriefing
- quality assuring protocols, procedures and functionality during the identification process
- establishing a family liaison strategy and risk assessment for obtaining antemortem data

- ensuring that the next of kin are kept informed throughout the investigation and identification process
- submitting antemortem and postmortem data to the identification commission in respect of fatalities
- establishing effective protocols for information sharing in line with gold strategy
- establishing a policy book or file for recording all policy decisions
- appointing experienced family liaison coordinators (FLCs)
- managing and assessing risk, health, safety and welfare issues
- considering appointing trained DVI managers such as scene evidence recovery manager (SERM), police mortuary operations coordinator (PMOC), antemortem coordinator (AMC) and reconciliation coordinator

Senior investigating officer

An emergency or major incident may require a criminal investigation. The senior investigating officer (SIO) will assume responsibility for all aspects of that investigation, including liaison with other authorised investigative bodies. The gold commander should consider early appointment of an SIO.

A police SIO is required to:

- perform the role of officer in charge of an investigation, as described in the Code of Practice under [**Part II of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996**](#), and be accountable to chief officers for conducting the investigation
- develop and implement the investigative strategy
- develop the information management and decision-making systems for the investigation
- manage the investigations' health, safety and welfare issues, as well as allocated resources

The relationship between the SIO and the SIM is crucial for effectively managing any DVI or mass fatality incident. They should agree [**terms of reference**](#) soon after their appointments and should determine the actual relationship and reporting structure, taking into account the incident's relevant circumstances. The designated strategic commander can then ratify the SIO and SIM's relationship, agreeing the command structure, and present these to the strategic coordination group (SCG). This enables all strategic and tactical commanders in the police service and partner agencies to understand where responsibilities lie.

Once agreed, the strategic commander, SIO and SIM should sign the [terms of reference](#). The SIO and SIM must record any changes to the terms of reference in a policy log entry.

Coroner

The coroner, or procurator fiscal in Scotland, is responsible for chairing the identification commission, where the identity of the deceased is confirmed.

A coroner conducts an inquest into the death of a person within their area, where they have reasonable cause to suspect that the deceased has died:

- a violent or unnatural death
- a sudden death of which the cause is unknown
- in prison, or in a place or circumstances requiring an inquest under legislation

It is the coroner's responsibility to establish the deceased's identity, as well as how, when and where the death occurred. They have the power to:

- take lawful possession and control of deceased persons or human remains from when the death is reported until all enquiries are complete
- authorise removing the deceased from their place of death to a mortuary and a full postmortem examination

Procurator fiscal

In Scotland, the procurator fiscal is the public official responsible for prosecuting crime. They are also responsible for investigating all sudden, suspicious and unexplained deaths. The procurator fiscal will investigate the circumstances of the death and the cause of death and, if necessary, instruct that a postmortem examination takes place.

In Scotland, death investigations may lead to a fatal accident inquiry, which is a form of judicial inquiry. There are two types of fatal accident inquiry:

1. **Mandatory** – where the deceased was in legal custody at the time of death or has died due to an accident while in the course of their employment
2. **Other inquiries** – are discretionary and take place on the instructions of the Lord Advocate

The fatal accident inquiry takes place in front of a sheriff (judge) and will lead to the sheriff issuing a determination. The purpose of a fatal accident inquiry is to identify any systemic defects in order that the judge may make recommendations to prevent a similar accident occurring in the future.

Strategic coordination group

The SCG has overall responsibility for the multi-agency management of the emergency. For further information, see [civil contingencies APP](#).

Tactical coordination group

The tactical commanders of all responding agencies should come together to form a [tactical coordination group](#) (TCG). The TCG should meet at an appropriate mutually agreed location as soon as practicable. For further information, see [civil contingencies APP](#).

Mass fatality coordination group

The mass fatality coordination group (MFCG) coordinates the DVI process on behalf of the gold commander and the coroner or the procurator fiscal. It allows sensitive matters regarding the deceased to be discussed outside the SCG.

The MFCG may be chaired by a coroner, procurator fiscal or the SIM. The SIM and the coroner or procurator fiscal can represent the MFCG at the SCG.

For further information see [MFCG aide memoire](#).

Mass fatalities coordination group members

Members of the MFCG can include:

- the coroner or procurator fiscal
- senior identification manager (SIM)
- senior investigating officer (SIO)
- scene evidence recovery manager (SERM)
- supervising or lead pathologist
- police mortuary operations coordinator (PMOC)

- family liaison coordinator (FLC)
- a local authority representative with delegated powers around finance
- a legal team representative
- a representative of the [Human Tissue Authority](#) (HTA)
- any other designated individual in relation to the HTA licence
- key staff from planning, resourcing and logistics teams

Casualty Bureau Incident Room

The Casualty Bureau (CB) Incident Room is the central point where all information related to an incident is received, collated and assessed. This includes information about people believed to be involved in the incident.

The CB Incident Room provides resources and a process to manage high-volume data, in order to identify key or critical information at the earliest opportunity. The CB Incident Room also provides a telephone line for the public to report people involved in an incident, as well as an online reporting facility, [Major Incident Public Portal](#) (MIPP).

This website can be used by the public to directly report information. It can also be used by police and other partner agencies to report people involved using the Investigative Triage Form (ITF), which is password-protected and predefined by the CB Manager.

A CB Incident Room is likely to be activated when there is a significant demand from the public for information that exceeds normal force call-handling capabilities. It may also be activated by the SIM to receive a significant volume of information from the public (using the ITF).

All police regions are required to have a CB Incident Room capability. All police forces can provide additional CB call-handling resources to support any other CB Incident Room upon a mutual aid request. All information received via the CB Incident Room telephone numbers and online via MIPP is recorded into a secure incident cloud-based account. This ensures that all information is collated in the same place.

When the CB Incident Room is activated for a mass fatality incident, it manages all information in relation to the recovery, reconciliation, identification and repatriation of victims, as well as criminal investigation.

For further information see [Casualty Bureau Manager Suggested Initial Actions.](#)

Family liaison coordinator

The SIM may consider appointing a family liaison coordinator (FLC) if the scale and nature of the incident require the deployment of multiple family liaison officers (FLOs). An FLC is usually a police officer of supervisory rank who is experienced in the field of family liaison.

See [Family Liaison Coordinator Suggested Initial Actions.](#)

Responsibilities

The FLC is responsible for:

- acting as the single point of contact for the senior identification manager (SIM)
- acting as the antemortem coordinator (AMC), when appropriate
- facilitating the implementation of the family liaison strategy and risk assessment
- advising the SIM and senior investigating officer (SIO) (if required) on family liaison issues
- fully documenting all decisions and rationale
- coordinating the availability and deployment of family liaison officers (FLOs), including to families outside the force area
- ensuring that the health, safety and welfare of FLOs is considered and appropriate risk assessments and support are in place
- managing the skills, knowledge and experience of the FLO team in terms of culture, lifestyle and equality, diversity and human rights issues
- coordinating all information arising from multiple FLO deployments
- ensuring all documentation is completed accurately and submitted in a timely manner
- ensuring all exhibits are submitted in a timely manner and will withstand being scrutinised for integrity
- liaising with the casualty bureau (CB) manager and AMC
- coordinating family viewings in liaison with the police mortuary operation coordinator (PMOC)
- agreeing exit strategies for all FLOs deployed
- ensuring that all personal property of the deceased is returned in accordance with the wishes of the bereaved
- ensuring that sufficient support is obtained for the families

- attending the multi-agency meetings, as directed by the SIM
- ensuring that sufficient equipment is available for the FLOs who are deployed (INTERPOL forms, exhibit labels and packaging)
- quality assure the FLO's work
- provide timely updates to the SIM or gold commander

Family liaison officer

The FLO helps the SIM and SIO achieve the identification and investigation strategies. This is different to a crisis support worker, who provides emotional and practical support to the family or friends. Antemortem-trained FLOs should be used when available, as they have additional expertise in antemortem collection in a mass fatality incident.

Responsibilities

The FLO is responsible for:

- undertaking day-to-day interaction with the family of the deceased
- acting as the initial link between the family and the senior identification manager (SIM)
- completing the yellow antemortem forms
- gathering antemortem data and evidence as required by the SIM's antemortem data collection strategy
- maintaining a written log of all contact with the family and other parties connected to the family, eg, solicitors
- collecting evidence as required by the investigation strategy
- facilitating contact with other statutory and voluntary agencies
- supporting the family in their contact with the media
- facilitating family visits to the scene or family viewing area as appropriate
- returning all personal property of the deceased in accordance with the wishes of the bereaved, as directed by the Family Liaison Coordinator (FLC)
- ensuring that referrals are made to support services
- reporting any risk factors to the FLC, antemortem coordinator (AMC) or SIM

Pathologist

The **pathologist** examines deceased persons or human remains and ensures that relevant data is recorded on the pink postmortem form.

The pathologist's main objectives are to:

- ascertain cause of death
- gather evidence for criminal investigation
- contribute towards gathering identification evidence

Toxicology

The pathologist may take samples for toxicology and DNA analysis, and undertake an autopsy when authorised to do so by the coroner or procurator fiscal. It is important that those involved in the care of the deceased recognise the emotional impact that taking toxicology samples may have on the victims' families, in particular when taking samples from children. This should only be carried out following careful consideration.

Responsibilities

It is the pathologist's responsibility to ensure recording of:

- external injuries and the position of injuries and/or burns
- a description and arrangement of traumas, fractures, internal bleeding and any upper respiratory issues
- old surgical procedures and internal implants, eg, pacemakers
- any anatomical particularities

The coroner or procurator fiscal appoints a forensic pathologist. In a mass fatality incident, the SIM and pathologist may agree to appoint additional pathologists to work under their supervision.

Anatomical pathology technologist

The anatomical pathology technologist (APT) has an important role in the mass fatality incident. They should be familiar with the mortuary environment, as well as the procedures and risks there.

The APT assists pathologists at the postmortem examination and assists police during the DVI process. They are experienced in handling bodies and removing clothing and other items during strip and search. APTs are also skilled in reconciling body parts and reconstructing the deceased. They prepare the deceased for viewing and release the bodies at the end of the DVI process.

Scene evidence recovery manager

DVI managers and personnel should have completed the College of Policing approved DVI courses relevant to their role.

The scene evidence recovery manager (SERM) is a police coordinator responsible for recovering deceased persons and human remains. They work on behalf of the coroner or procurator fiscal and the SIM.

On appointment, the SERM discusses the DVI strategy, policy and process with the SIM. They should attend the scene to liaise with the incident commanders. The SERM ensures that appropriate controls are in place at the scene to restrict access to authorised persons. They are responsible for collating and documenting evidence. The SERM ensures that due respect is paid to the deceased lying within the scene, taking account of circumstances at that time.

The uninjured are evacuated from the scene and emergency triage provided to the injured. Following this, the [rescue](#) phase can be declared over. The [response](#) phase moves into [retrieval and investigation](#). The SERM assumes responsibility for the area contained within the inner cordon from the fire and rescue scene commander. The SERM assesses personnel, equipment and specialist assistance required to recover deceased, and the timescale involved.

For further information see [Scene Evidence Recovery Manager Suggested Initial Actions](#).

Responsibilities

On appointment, the SERM is responsible for:

- overall scene management and coordination
- ensuring scene preservation and security
- appointing, tasking and coordinating specialists at the scene

- implementing predetermined strategies for identification and investigation
- obtaining evidence, including seizing and retaining personal property for identification and/or criminal investigation at the scene(s)
- completing all appropriate documentation
- chairing the scene evidence recovery group and ensuring that effective briefings are conducted between multiple agencies
- fully documenting all decisions and rationale in a decision log
- liaising with other stakeholders, including initial responders and category 1 and 2 responders, in compliance with obligations set out in the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)
- managing the health, safety and welfare of all personnel at the scene
- identifying the importance of risk assessments, as well as health, safety and welfare strategies of themselves and their colleagues at all phases of disaster victim identification (DVI) operations
- identifying and coordinating specialist logistical support provided by external contractors
- managing family/VIP attendance at the scene

Police mortuary operations coordinator

DVI managers and personnel should have completed the College of Policing approved DVI courses relevant to their role.

A police mortuary operations coordinator (PMOC) should be appointed in any mortuary, whether based in existing mortuary facilities or an emergency mortuary. The PMOC is responsible for ensuring compliance with all police DVI procedures at the mortuary for identifying the deceased and investigating the incident. The PMOC will be a suitably trained and qualified police officer or member of police staff.

The PMOC manages the police mortuary teams and liaises between the mortuary documentation officer and the supervising or lead pathologist, while ensuring that the agreed mortuary procedure is implemented.

See [Police Mortuary Operations Coordinator Suggested Initial Actions](#).

Responsibilities

The police mortuary operations coordinator (PMOC) is responsible for:

- obtaining, seizing and retaining evidence and personal property at the mortuary in line with strategies set by the senior investigating officer (SIO) and senior identification manager (SIM)
- liaising with the designated individual to ensure the provisions of the [Human Tissue Act 2004](#) are adhered to within the mortuary
- ensuring continuity and security of evidence
- ensuring that all relevant postmortem documentation is completed
- liaising with the emergency mortuary coordinator
- coordinating the activities of specialists in the mortuary
- liaising with funeral directors
- managing the health, safety and welfare of all personnel in the mortuary and ensuring that the appropriate risk assessments are documented
- coordinating family attendance for viewing purposes
- mortuary security
- documenting all personal decisions and the rationale for them
- assisting the mortuary facilities manager with decommissioning an emergency mortuary
- ensuring all personal or sensitive information is handled correctly
- ensuring no photographs are taken in the mortuary unless authorised

Local authorities

Local authorities may have agreements with private sector organisations to support the response to a mass fatality incident. Any such arrangements should be incorporated into local or regional mass fatality plans.

Local authorities are [responsible](#) for providing:

- an executive officer to attend the SCG
- immediate shelter and welfare support for survivors at a survivors reception centre
- emergency mortuary capability, if existing mortuary provision is exceeded
- inspection of dangerous structures to ensure that they are safe for emergency personnel to enter
- support for [traffic management](#)
- emergency transport facilities for evacuees, survivors and casualties
- medium-term to long-term welfare of survivors and bereaved (for example, setting up survivor reception centres, evacuation and humanitarian assistance centres, and social care support)

- specialist environmental and public health advice
- coordination of activities of involved voluntary sector agencies and spontaneous volunteers
- facilities for waste disposal and facilitation of remediation and reoccupation of affected sites or areas
- assistance in organising plant, demolition and site clearance facilities emergency accommodation and care for the displaced or homeless

Multi-agency response

Various agencies and organisations (private and voluntary) may be involved in the response to a mass fatality incident. Each agency's level of involvement is determined by the incident's scale and nature. Each [local resilience forum](#) (LRF) has plans and arrangements in place for dealing with mass fatality incidents.

The multi-agency response will follow the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles (JESIP):

- co-Location
- communication
- coordination
- joint understanding of risk
- shared situational awareness

Further information can be found at [JESIP](#).

Agencies that may be involved in the response to a mass fatality incident in the UK and abroad

These include:

- [Home Office](#) and [Cabinet Office](#)
- [LRFs](#)
- local authorities
- fire and rescue service
- [Department of Health](#) and the [NHS](#)
- [Ministry of Defence](#)

- Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)
- UK National Disaster Victim Identification Unit (UK DVI)
- National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC)
- [Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE)
- [Air Accidents Investigation Branch](#) (AAIB)
- [Rail Accident Investigation Branch](#) (RAIB)
- [Marine Accident Investigation Branch](#) (MAIB)
- [Maritime and Coastguard Agency](#)
- [INTERPOL](#)
- private sector
- voluntary sector

National planning for a mass fatality response is coordinated centrally by the Emergency Preparedness Fatalities Team in the Home Office and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

The Home Office is the lead government department for the mass fatality capability. It provides a framework for the multi-agency response to such incidents.

For further information, see the Home Office's [Guidance on dealing with fatalities in emergencies](#), and 'Supplementing local response options: A concept of operations for accessing central assistance to supplement local responses to mass fatalities in England and Wales' (this document is available from the Home Office on application).

Fire and rescue service

The role of the fire and rescue service in an [emergency](#) or major incident is to rescue those trapped by fire, wreckage or debris. They may also support recovering deceased persons and human remains.

The fire and rescue service has an urban search and rescue capability (USAR). They can assist in recovering deceased and human remains from constricted sites, collapsed buildings or from the wreckage of transport incidents.

See [NFCC and NPCC \(2017\) Joint Working Principles for Urban Search and Rescue Support to Police in Disaster Victim Identification](#).

Professional development

Training is required to support personnel and procedures, and all relevant agencies should be involved in a programme of exercises.

Each LRF should have an exercise programme that includes the response to a mass fatality incident. It may not be practicable or financially viable to cover the full DVI process in one exercise. However, police forces should be able to show that they have tested all aspects of a mass fatality response within a reasonable timescale.

In addition to formal training and exercising, and to remain current in the area of DVI, all personnel who may be involved in the response to a mass fatality incident should pursue continuing professional development. All DVI foundation-trained staff must complete refresher training in accordance with the mandated national standard.

Tags

Civil emergencies